

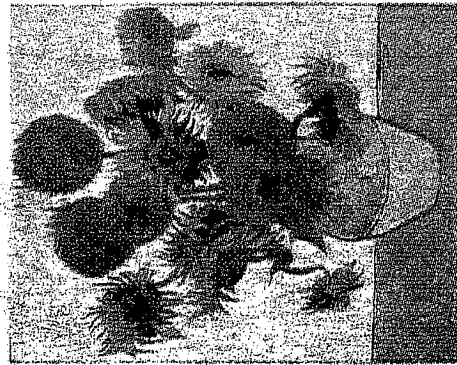
THE ART OF BEER

BY DON TSE

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My love affair with art began, ironically enough, during a beer trip several years ago. I was in London, England for the Great British Beer Festival and stopped in at the National Gallery just off Trafalgar Square. Established in 1824, the National Gallery is home to the United Kingdom's public collection of art and houses some of the most seminal works in the history of painting.

Of the thousands of paintings housed by the National Gallery, one stood out for me. Sunflowers, one of four such paintings painted in 1888 by Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh, had such brilliance that I was drawn to it. I had, of course, seen dozens of photographs of this painting in books, but it was only when I saw the painting in person that I understood the genius within it. The painting has an amazing depth of colour despite the



simplicity of the artist's brush strokes.

Photographs in books cannot do justice to the details that make this a great piece. It was not until I was able to see the piece in person that I realized that this was much more than a representation of a vase of sunflowers. Great art, I learned, is in the details of the paintings. In the case of Van Gogh's sunflowers, the

genius is in how the thick and rich paint strokes give the painting an enigmatic light airiness.

I find that the same is true with craft beer. Great beer is not merely malty, hoppy, sweet or bitter. It is the small things that differentiate a beer that is merely drinkable from beer that is a world classic.

In this and other respects, Duvel, which has been brewed since 1923 by the Brouwerij Moortgat in Breendonk, Belgium, is similar. Despite being 8.5% in strength, this beer has an effervescence that gives the beer liveliness. A subdued fruitiness and a gentle spiciness that

come from the two yeast strains used to ferment Duvel brings complexity to it.

Many Belgian golden ales (usually playing on the Duvel, which means "devil," name) have attempted to follow in Duvel's footsteps. Many are golden; many are high alcohol and effervescent. Anybody can see the similarities, but what makes Duvel great are the subtle, balanced complexities. It is these small things that differentiate great beer from good beer.

Sunflowers and Duvel share a lot in common. Their bright colour and depth are inviting and lift the

spirit. And yet once you've accepted the invitation and immersed yourself in the visual or the liquid art, they both offer much more. Both have a richness to them that is balanced against more delicate elements. Once inside, you will want to linger and enjoy the intricacies of both the painting and the beer.

But, do not be deceived by Duvel's surprising drinkability. If you drink too many of these in one sitting, you may have the types of hallucinations that cause you to cut off your own ear.